

Nesting Birds of the Malheur
Environmental Field Station

by

James W. Greer

Malheur Environmental Field Station

Course: Ornithology

July 5, 1972

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to expose the reader to the various birds nesting on the Malheur Environmental Field Station (MEFS). Each species will be discussed briefly as to the stage of development of the eggs or young and other points of interest that might prove valuable. This study period is more or less a spot check, since all nests were found between June 24 and July 2 of 1972.

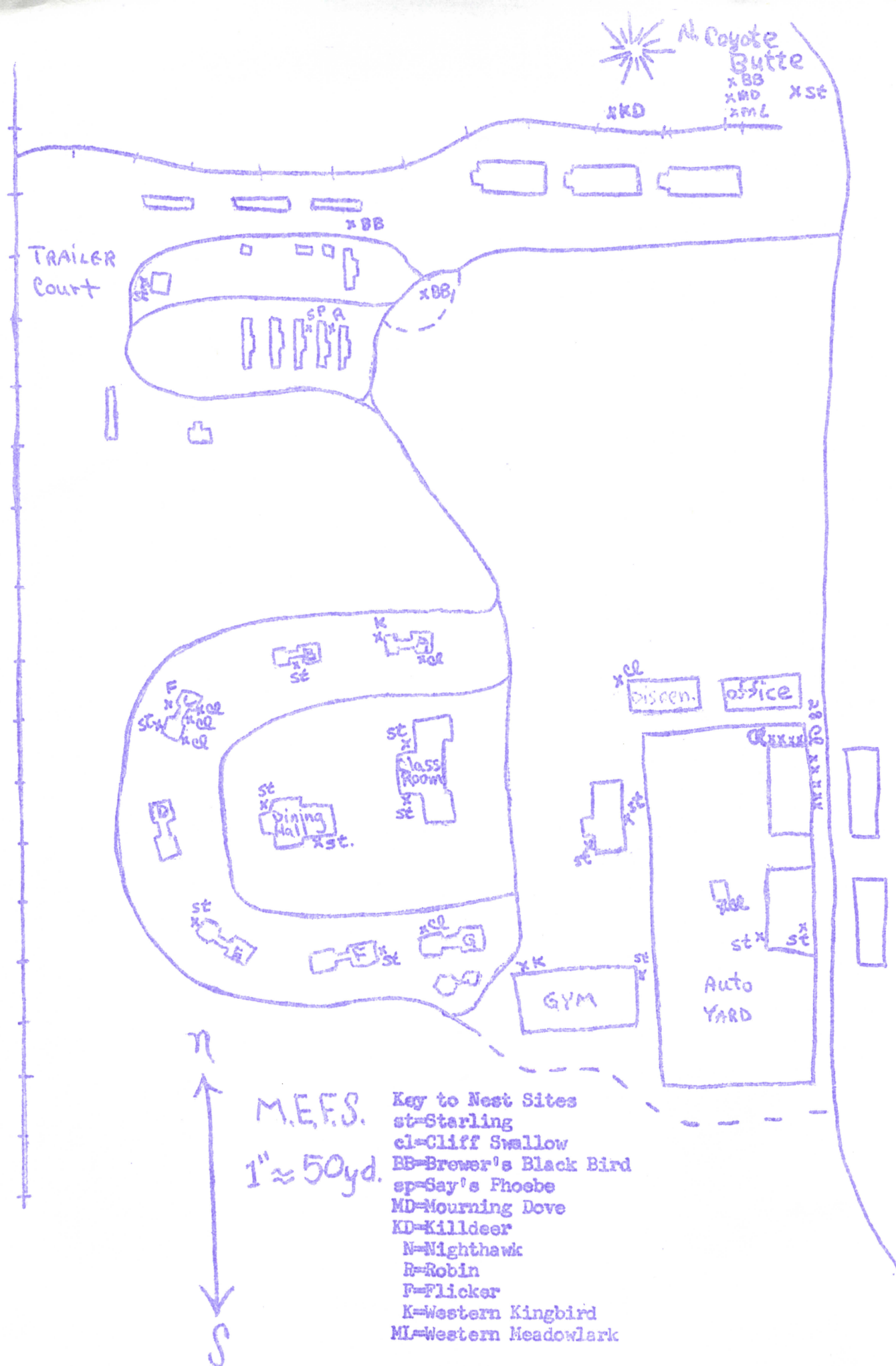
METHODOLOGY

Observation by looking in likely places and watching adult birds, were the main methods used in locating the nests. Often the adult birds would be displaying the broken wing act, as in the case of a few pairs of Killdeer, but the nest was so well camouflaged that it could not be found. Observations from several yards, as well as close up, provided the information on nest development.

DISCUSSION

Eleven species were found to be nesting on the station premises including one egg each in two Brewer's Blackbird (Euphagus cyanocephalus) nests, belonging to a Brown-headed Cowbird (Molothrus ater). Each species will be briefly discussed as to the young developmental stage and any other pertinent observations. (See the map on page 2 for location of nests.)
Cliff Swallow (Petrochelidon pyrrhonota)

There were 38 nests found on the station actively housing Cliff Swallows. A colony of 32 nests was located under the eaves of one of the shops in the auto yard, the other 6 were built under the eaves of three dorms. What is interesting to note is that most all of the nests face, or are built on, the east sides of all the buildings. This may help them get the day's first



warmth, as well as light to begin the activities of the day. When this nest census began, all of the Swallow young had been fledged, although they were still fed insects by the adults at the nest site. Apparently some of the adults were incubating another clutch or were unsuccessful in the first brood, for by the end of the census there were new eggs in a few of the nests.

Starling (Sturnus vulgaris)

The Starlings were the second most abundant bird nesting at MEFS. Fifteen nests in all were found, and all but one was located in the small ventilator holes under the eaves of most of the buildings. The wire screen covering these holes had been broken through, and the nest of grass laid in the wall of the building. There were no more than two nests for each building occupied. Most of the young that were observable were either $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ s feathered. All were dependent on the adults for food and cheeped loudly upon the return of their parents, in a begging fashion.

Brewer's Blackbird (Euphagus cyanocephalus)

There were three nests found, all containing five eggs to begin with. Three young were hatched from a roadside nest that had virtually no cover at all. Only the Cowbird (one of the five eggs) survived to leave the nest. One young was killed, another died, and the remaining eggs never hatched.

Another nest in the children's play ground under a greasewood bush fledged 4 birds, including a Cowbird, and left one egg unhatched. The third nest on the side of North Coyote Butte still had eggs at the time of this writing.

Western Kingbird (Tyrannus verticalis)

Two nests were located on the station, both in gutters of buildings - one

on the main gym, the other Dorm A. It seems evident that those birds need to nest high off the ground to avoid predation. The nest in Dorm A had 5 eggs until July 2, when two of them hatched young. The other nest was unobservable.

Red Shafted Flicker (Colaptes cafer)

One nest was found late in the study period in one of the ventilator holes of the men's dorm (C). Much digging was done inside the wall, apparently making room for a nest or digging grubs. The female was the only one seen in the nest, while the male was observed once sitting above the nest on the roof. Apparently the eggs had been laid ^{and in the process of incubation} which is the primary job of the female.

Say's Phoebe (Sayornis saya)

One pair of Say's Phoebe were observed nesting in the area, although it is believed by some that there is another nest in the far northeast house. These birds have a relatively compact nest made of soft material and grasses. The nest had ~~several~~ eggs being incubated (no count available).

Mourning Dove (Zenaidura macroura)

One nest located on the south side of North Coyote Butte had two eggs until the 2nd of July. The eggs hatched, but after they were a few hours old, the young were abandoned. The only possible answer that I can think of is that there was too much human disturbance of the nest and the dove spent a vast amount of energy leaving the nest in defense of it. There are many other possibilities that could account for this abandonment.

Robin (Turdus migratorius)

One nest ^{was} located in the garage shelter of the trailer court. The female had just laid the eggs, since the nest had not been used for several

days prior to the observation of the area.

Western Meadowlark (Sturnella neglecta)

This bird was never active during my observations, but had fledged young and left one egg abandoned.

Killdeer (Charadrius vociferus)

This single nest was also located on the south side of North Coyote Butte. Four eggs were ^{found} in the very undeveloped nest. There seemed to be at least three other nesting pairs of Killdeer on the station from the actions given when intruding on their territories.

Nighthawk (Chordeiles minor)

This nest was also found near the end of the study period when it was flushed off its nest. Only one egg was found at the nest site which consisted only of a single egg. The shell of a second egg had been broken and discarded a foot away from the nest site.

CONCLUSION

The above has been a spot check of the nesting birds of MEFS and the developmental stages of the various species' nests. Although a few nests may have been missed because of the great ability of birds to hide them - a good representation was found to indicate the kinds of species and the most dominant birds (in numbers) found on the station.